

Cricket 90

Chapter 90

After the conclusion of the ODI series, a nine-day break was scheduled before the T20 series commenced. Unfortunately, I wasn't selected for the squad this time. Initially, the news stung a little, but I quickly reminded myself that my journey had just begun. Cricket was a game of patience and perseverance, and I knew that one day I would reach a point where my name would be an automatic selection across all formats. Until then, I was determined to work even harder and prove my worth.

While most of the players were busy planning their vacations and short getaways, Shubman Gill decided to rush back to India as he was set to participate in the upcoming Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. I, on the other hand, opted out of domestic cricket for the time being. I wanted to take a step back, focus on my training, and give my mind some rest from the constant grind. After all, the international circuit was demanding, and I needed to be at my absolute best when I returned.

As Gill packed his bags and left for the airport, I felt a sudden sense of solitude. The BCCI-allotted hotel was bustling with activity, but I craved some personal space and luxury. Without a second thought, I decided to leave the team hotel and book a stay at one of the finest hotels in New Zealand—The Grand Auckland. I booked the presidential suite, something I'd always dreamt of experiencing in New Zealand. The suite was a marvel in itself, offering panoramic views of the city skyline, ocean, a private lounge, and impeccable service. I felt like I had truly arrived in life, and for a moment, I let myself bask in the luxury.

What I didn't realize at the time was that I wasn't the only Indian cricketer staying at this hotel. As fate would have it, Virat Bhaiya and Anushka Bhabhi were also there, enjoying some private time away from the constant limelight. Alongside them, MS Dhoni Bhaiya was present with his wife, Sakshi Bhabhi, and their adorable daughter, Ziva.

I had no idea they were staying here. I had simply chosen the hotel for its reputation, but it turned out to be a pleasant surprise. Meanwhile, Rohit Bhaiya wasn't here with his family, as he had recently welcomed his daughter a few months ago and had chosen to stay back to spend some quality time with her. Dhawan Bhaiya, however, was here with his wife, although their son was not accompanying them this time.

As I settled into my suite, I decided to explore the hotel's facilities. The gym was state-of-the-art, the spa looked inviting, and the rooftop pool had an unbeatable view. I was just about to head to the gym when I received a text from an unknown number.

"Enjoying the presidential suite, champ?"

I frowned, wondering who it could be. Just as I was about to reply, a knock sounded on my door. I opened it to find none other than Dhoni Bhaiya standing there, his signature calm smile in place.

"Surprised?" he asked, stepping inside with his ever-casual demeanor.

"Bhaiya! I had no idea you were staying here!" I said, feeling a mix of excitement and nervousness. After all, it wasn't every day that MS Dhoni casually walked into your hotel suite.

"Neither did I, until Sakshi spotted you at the lobby check-in," he chuckled. "So, how's the break treating you?"

"It's been great so far. Just trying to relax and focus on improving myself," I replied.

Dhoni nodded approvingly. "Good, good. Breaks are important, but don't overthink the non-selection. You've got talent, and your time will come. Just stay consistent."

His words held so much weight, and I absorbed them like a sponge. If there was one person who knew how to navigate the highs and lows of cricket, it was him.

As we chatted, I heard an excited voice outside my suite. Before I could register what was happening, a little bundle of energy dashed into the room—it was Ziva. She ran up to Dhoni and tugged at his hand.

"Papa, who is this?" she asked curiously, looking at me with big innocent eyes.

"This is Aarav, our new cricket star," Dhoni introduced me with a smile.

I knelt down to her level and said, "Hi, Ziva! Nice to meet you."

She gave me a shy smile and whispered, "Are you a better cricketer than Papa?"

Dhoni and I burst out laughing. "I've got a long way to go," I said, shaking my head.

After a bit more conversation, Dhoni Bhaiya invited me to dinner with the rest of the group. The idea of sitting at a table with Virat Bhaiya, Anushka Bhabhi, and Dhawan Bhaiya was both thrilling and nerve-wracking. But I accepted the invitation without hesitation.

That evening, as I walked into the private dining area of the hotel, I saw everyone already gathered around the table. Virat Bhaiya gave me a nod of approval, Anushka Bhabhi smiled warmly, and Sakshi Bhabhi welcomed me with open arms. Dhawan Bhaiya was cracking jokes, as always, and the atmosphere was light and cheerful.

As the evening approached, I felt a mix of excitement and nervousness. Virat Bhaiya had booked a table at the restaurants in the hotel for a casual dinner, and I was invited. I had spent quite some time deciding what to wear, finally settling on a simple casual outfit—trouser and a comfortable hoodie. Looking at myself in the mirror, I took a deep breath and headed down to the restaurant.

When I arrived, everyone was already seated. The atmosphere was warm, filled with light chatter and laughter. Virat Bhaiya, Anushka Bhabhi, Dhoni Bhaiya, Sakshi Bhabhi, and little Ziva were all there. "Bhabhi," in Indian culture, is a term of respect and affection used to address an elder brother's wife, and it instantly brings a sense of familiarity and warmth. Dhawan Bhaiya wasn't present; he had gone out with his family for the night.

I hesitated for a moment at the entrance, feeling a little overwhelmed by the star-studded presence. Gathering my courage, I walked up to the table and said, "Sorry, I'm a bit late."

Virat Bhaiya smiled and waved it off. "No worries. This isn't a formal meeting, just a casual dinner. Relax."

I smiled, feeling more at ease as I greeted everyone individually. "Hi Anushka Bhabhi, hi Sakshi Bhabhi," I said with folded hands in a respectful gesture. Then I turned to Ziva, who was comfortably sitting in Dhoni Bhaiya's lap, looking at me curiously. "Hi, Ziva!" I said with a smile.

She tilted her head slightly and asked, "Are you the same Aarav who I meet before, and who bowl super-fast, your photo was in the newspaper?"

I chuckled. "Yes, that's me! But I think you're faster than me when you run around, right?"

She giggled and nodded. "Papa says I run very fast!"

Dhoni Bhaiya smiled. "She does, trust me. Faster than a bullet train when it comes to running away from bedtime."

Ziva pointed at me and asked, "Do you know any magic tricks?"

I pretended to think hard. "Hmm... I know one. Want to see?"

She nodded eagerly. I took a spoon and pretended to make it disappear with a quick sleight of hand, hiding it behind my hand. "Ta-da!"

Her eyes widened in amazement. "Wow! You really know magic!"

Everyone at the table laughed, and I felt a sense of warmth as I realized I was already bonding with Ziva. "I'll teach you one next time," I said, giving her a high five.

As the food arrived, the conversation shifted, and I found myself chatting with Anushka Bhabhi and Sakshi Bhabhi. They were incredibly warm and easy to talk to.

"So Aarav," Anushka Bhabhi started, "How are you finding New Zealand so far? Enjoying the break?"

I smiled. "It's beautiful here. The break has been good too, a chance to unwind and focus on myself. But I do miss being in the squad for the T20s."

Sakshi Bhabhi nodded understandingly. "That's completely normal. Every player goes through this phase. You're young, and your time will come."

"That's what I keep telling myself," I replied. "I'm using this time to train and improve. I want to be prepared for when my chance comes again."

Anushka Bhabhi leaned in. "That's a great attitude. Just stay consistent and keep believing in yourself. Trust me, the mental game is as important as the physical one."

I nodded, grateful for their encouragement. "Thanks, Bhabhi. It means a lot to hear that from you."

Sakshi Bhabhi smiled. "And don't forget to enjoy the journey too! Cricket is important, but so is life outside of it."

We talked about various things—travel experiences, and even some light-hearted gossip about the team's off-field moments. I found myself laughing easily, and any nervousness I had earlier was completely gone.

Meanwhile, Virat Bhaiya and Dhoni Bhaiya were deep in a discussion about match strategies, while Ziva was busy playing with the cutlery, pretending they were her cricket bats.

At one point, Anushka Bhabhi asked, "So Aarav, do you have any hobbies apart from cricket?"

I thought for a moment. "I enjoy adventure, exploring different places and music especially playing the guitar. It helps me relax after a long day."

"Oh, that's amazing!" Sakshi Bhabhi said. "You should play for us sometime."

"Sure," I laughed. "But don't blame me if your ears hurt."

Anushka Bhabhi grinned. "Don't worry, we'll judge kindly."

The dinner went on with everyone sharing their experiences. Virat Bhaiya spoke about his early struggles, how he stayed focused despite setbacks, and how important it was to have a strong support

system. "Family plays a huge role," he said. "No matter how far you go in your career, having them by your side keeps you grounded."

Dhoni Bhaiya, , added, "Patience is key, Aarav. Some players bloom early, some take time. What matters is persistence and dedication."

I absorbed every word, feeling incredibly fortunate to be in the company of such greats.

As the night went on, the conversation took a lighter turn. We joked about dressing room pranks, with Virat Bhaiya recalling a time when the team replaced his protein shake with a weird concoction made by Chahal.

Speaking of Chahal, just as we were finishing up, he suddenly appeared at our table with his phone acting as a mic. "Hello, hello! Reporting live from Chahal TV! We have here the newest rising star, Aarav!"

I laughed as he shoved the 'mic' in my face. "Chahal Bhaiya, what's this?"

"Sir, sir!" he said in a mock reporter tone. "Tell us, how does it feel to dine with cricket legends? Nervous? Excited? Did they give you any secret tips?"

I played along. "Well, it's an honor, but mostly I'm here for the free food!"

Everyone burst out laughing. Chahal continued, "And tell me, have you learned any cool captaincy tips from Mahi Bhai?"

I grinned. "Yes, of course. First tip—always stay cool. Second tip—always have an escape plan when Chahal is around."

Chahal feigned shock. "Oh no, betrayal on Chahal TV!"

Virat Bhaiya chimed in. "We need to have a special episode where we expose Aarav's hidden talents."

"Done, done!" Chahal declared, pretending to note it down on his phone.

Chahal was here for dinner only, with Kuldeep Yadav and Kedar Jhadav.

The dinner ended on a high note, with everyone in great spirits. As I made my way back to my suite, I reflected on how special the night had been. I had bonded not just with my teammates but with their families, and it made me feel more connected to the cricketing fraternity.

I knew that my journey was just beginning, but with such support and encouragement around me, I was confident that I was on the right path.

After the wonderful dinner with the team and their families, I returned to my hotel suite, feeling a sense of contentment. The evening had been memorable, filled with laughter, inspiring conversations, and a newfound camaraderie with the legends of Indian cricket. However, as I lay in bed, I couldn't shake off the excitement bubbling inside me—not just from the dinner but for something even more thrilling I had planned.

Scrolling through my phone, I revisited the idea that had been sitting in my mind for a while now—buying a luxury sports car. And not just any sports car, but a Lamborghini Huracán Evo Spyder, the only one of its kind in New Zealand. My heart raced just thinking about it. The vibrant green color, the roaring V10 engine, the sleek design—it was everything I had ever dreamed of.

Without wasting another second, I opened an online dealership platform that specialized in high-end exotic cars. The listing was still available. A grin spread across my face as I clicked on the 'Rent Now' button.

The renting process wasn't as simple as clicking a button, though. The dealership required several important documents, and I quickly got to work. First, I uploaded a scanned copy of my passport as proof of identity. Next came my international driving license, which I had secured before the tour, knowing I might get an opportunity to drive in foreign countries. Finally, they requested my bank statement to verify my financial eligibility. It took a bit of back and forth, but within an hour, all the documents were verified and approved.

An email popped up in my inbox:

"Congratulations, Mr. Aarav! Your Lamborghini Huracán Evo Spyder (Green) has been successfully assigned to you. The vehicle will be delivered to your designated location by 9:00 AM tomorrow. The keys will be handed over to the hotel staff, as per your instructions."

Before shutting my phone, I quickly sent a message to the hotel reception, informing them that a special delivery would arrive in the morning and that the keys should be kept safe until I came to collect them.

Satisfied and still buzzing with excitement, I finally put my phone down, sinking into the plush hotel bed. The anticipation of tomorrow made it difficult to fall asleep, but eventually, exhaustion from the day caught up with me.

The next morning

I woke up later than usual, the excitement already coursing through me. I quickly got ready, throwing on a comfortable tracksuit, and glanced at my watch—09:55 AM. I asked for breakfast in the room only. After getting ready and breakfast, I went down for enjoying my day in Lamborghini Huracán Evo Spyder.

I took the elevator down to the lobby and approached the front desk. "Good morning! Has any delivery arrived for me?" I asked.

The receptionist smiled. "Yes, Mr. Aarav. A car was delivered earlier, and the keys are right here." She handed over a sleek Lamborghini key fob with the famous bull logo.